

Educator Preparation for the 21st Century



The future needs of students and schools have important implications for educator preparation. Professional educators need to bring many important qualities into school learning environments. They should be well educated in the core curriculum and the essential skills of writing, reading and reasoning. Educators should also be persons who embrace core values such as honesty, respect for diversity, commitment to social justice, and openness to change.

Core values and knowledge will be essential *but not sufficient* in the increasingly di-verse and complex schools of the future. With increasing student variability, changing social conditions in our communities, and new developments in many disciplines of knowledge, it is no longer possible for generalists in education to serve all the legiti-mate purposes of education effectively. Individual educators should have increasingly specialized abilities along with the talent and commitment to serve collaboratively with other professionals.

Prospective educators therefore need basic general education followed by specialized professional studies, supervised practica and preparation to serve in diverse settings. Future classroom teachers need an integrated curriculum of content studies; analyses of teaching, learning and human development; and increasing responsibilities for the instruction of students. Other prospective educators need specialized studies and prac-tica in school administration, career counseling, language development, psychological assessment, information science, school health and several related fields.

These essential components of educator preparation cannot simply be *included* in each professional's education; each element should be characterized by excellent teaching, disciplined research, productive dialogue and a spirit of inquiry and investigation. Preprofessional experiences in the schools should be carefully planned, supervised and assessed by qualified institutional personnel in relation to realistic expectations related to the competence of entry-level professionals. As prospective educators acquire their own postsecondary education, they must interact with competent, caring role models as well as committed students with diverse professional goals. Both the curriculum and the institutional environment of educator preparation should be *educative* in the highest sense.

Professional Accreditation and Certification



Professional accreditation is the process of ascertaining and verifying that, at each college and university that prepares individuals for state certification, sufficient quality characterizes that preparation. State certification is the process of ascertaining and verifying the qualifications of each future member of a profession like education. These two processes -- professional accreditation and state certification -- have distinct objectives but they serve a common set of overarching purposes. It is critical, there-fore, that accreditation and certification function as *an integrated system* for the purposes that are outlined below.

In education, the first purpose of a professional accreditation and certification system is to assure the public, the students and the profession that future educators have access to excellence in content education, specialized preparation and professional practice in education, and that these components of educator preparation are oriented to the educational needs of future elementary and secondary students. Assuring excellence in educator preparation is the distinctive objective of *accreditation* in this system. Ensuring that each licensed educator has completed accredited preparation is the distinctive function of *certification*. By integrating accreditation with certification, policymakers can also ensure that educator preparation will be responsive to the critical dynamic needs of elementary and secondary schools.

A second essential function of an accreditation-certification system is to ensure that future educators have actually acquired abilities and perspectives that are essential for fulfilling specified professional responsibilities such as teaching or other services in schools. To ensure that professional credentials provide such assurances, *certification* decisions should be based on valid assessments of accepted standards of competence for entry-level service as professional educators. *Accreditation* also contributes to these assurances by ascertaining and verifying that each candidate's growing competence is assessed and confirmed by an accredited institution. An integrated accreditation-certification system provides the strongest possible assurance that professional credentials are awarded to individuals who have earned them on the basis of their competence.

A third critical purpose of accreditation and certification is to verify that each educator's specialized preparation and attainments are appropriate for the assignment of particular responsibilities in schools, and that these responsibilities are related to his or her preparation and expertise in the profession. Assuring the appropriateness of specialized preparation for future responsibilities is a distinctive objective of *accreditation* in the system. Verifying that each educator's responsibilities are based on actual preparation and expertise is a function of *certification*. An integrated system of accreditation and certification maximizes the prospect that assigned duties will be consistent with prior preparation and competence as an educator.

Finally, the fourth goal of an accreditation-certification system is to contribute to broader efforts to enhance the personal stature and professional standing of teachers and other educators as members of a profession that has a strong base of specialized knowledge and a demonstrated record of accomplishment in elementary and secondary schools. Related to this important goal, an objective of *accreditation* in education is to foster improvements in the design, content and delivery of professional curricula and practice, and in the selection, guidance, supervision and assessment of candidates. A related objective of *certification* is to provide reliable information about the collective knowledge, competence and accomplishments of professional educators. Functioning together, accreditation and certification have greater capacity to enhance the stature of education as a profession in the eyes of students, parents and other citizens.

The overall effectiveness of education in California depends, in part, on the systemic cohesiveness of educator preparation, accreditation, assessment and certification. Attempts to disassemble the components of this system may serve the interests of some of its participants, but the effective education of elementary and secondary students requires that they be integrally linked. This linkage with the certification system is one of seven essential attributes of an accreditation system for educator preparation institutions in California.

